

# Ida B

## ...and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World

by Katherine Hannigan

illustrated by Steven Mach

10/26/2012  
COMMON CORE  
STANDARDS SEMINAR:  
ANNOTATION  
ACTIVITY  
SAMPLE TEXT  
[Annotate for complexity]



### Essential Question

What experiences can change the way you see yourself and the world around you?

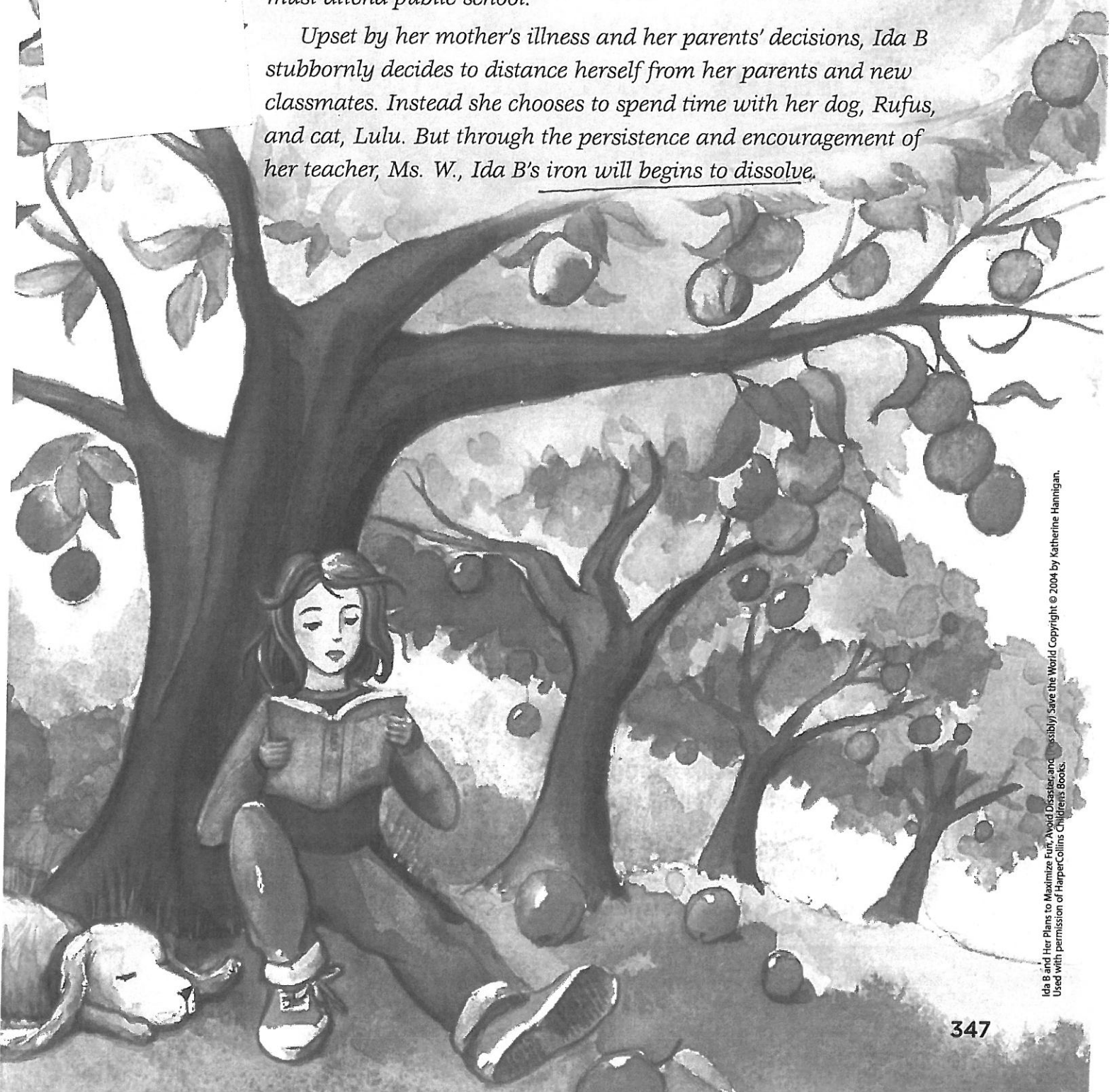
Read about how Ida B's experience at school gives her a new perspective.

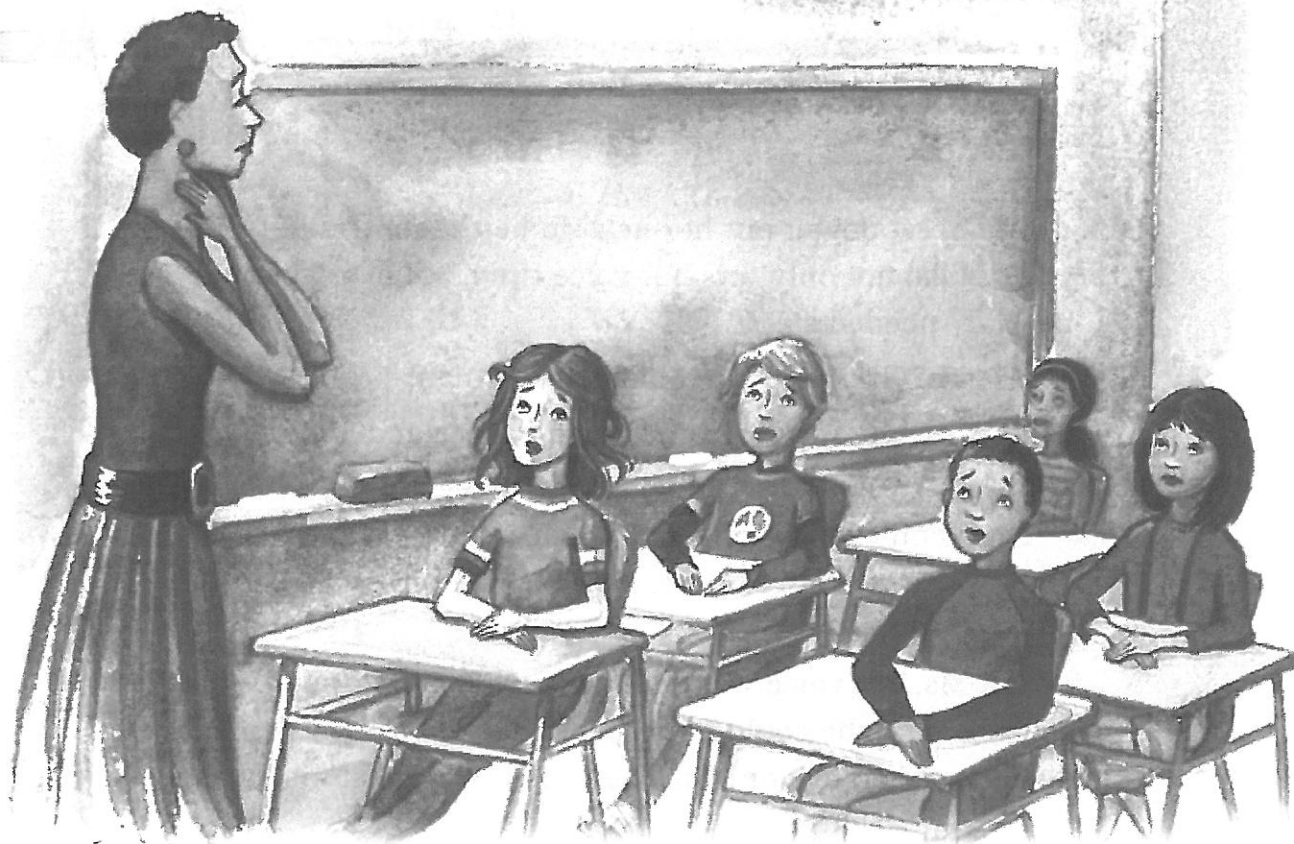


Go Digital!

Ida B is an independent girl who loves spending time in her family's apple orchard. Unfortunately, Ida B's world turns upside down when her mother is diagnosed with cancer. Her parents are forced to sell part of the orchard to pay medical bills, which means that many of Ida B's beloved trees will be cut down to make room for houses. But that's just the beginning. Ida B finds out that her days of being home-schooled are coming to an end and that she must attend public school.

Upset by her mother's illness and her parents' decisions, Ida B stubbornly decides to distance herself from her parents and new classmates. Instead she chooses to spend time with her dog, Rufus, and cat, Lulu. But through the persistence and encouragement of her teacher, Ms. W., Ida B's iron will begins to dissolve.





One day after lunch Ms. W. told the class, "I know it's time to read, but I don't think I can do it today. My voice is too tired."

She put her hand on her throat and scrunched up her face like something was painning her. It was the same face she'd make when Simone Martini was just about yelling across the room to Patrice Polinski, and Ms. W. would say, "Simone, use your inside voice. You are hurting my ears."

Everybody looked up from their chattering or worksheets at just about the same time, in exactly the same direction, with the same expression on their faces: a mix of thirty percent shock, twenty percent disbelief, and fifty percent plain old sad.

"Aw, man!" Matthew Dribble said right out loud.

I felt like the bottom had just dropped out of my stomach and everything I ate for lunch was tumbling around in my gut.

"Nope, my voice is just too tired," Ms. W. said, and, sure enough, it was sounding weak and raspy. "And we were going to read *Alexandra Potemkin* and *the Space Shuttle to Planet Z*, too. Well, that's disappointing."



Ms. W. sat down, put her head in her hand, and her body wilted. Like not only was her voice tired, but every bone in her body needed a rest.

"Please?" begged Alice Mae Grunderman.

"Please, Ms. Washington?" asked Patrice and Simone at the same time, with the same moon-eyed face.

And then everybody got the idea, and it became a sort of song with a verse of "Please, Ms. Washington" and a chorus of "Please, please, please."

But Ms. W's voice was deteriorating at an alarming speed, because now she could only speak in a hoarse whisper, and everybody had to stop with their "please"ing just to hear her.

"I'm sorry, but I can't."

She paused, and we could all tell by the look on her face that she was thinking hard. So we stayed quiet to give her some room.

"Maybe," she said, looking up and forcing a weak smile, "we could have a guest reader, just for today?"

Well, it was hard to imagine anybody but Ms. W. reading, and we all just sat there for a minute. Then one by one, people started nodding their heads and looking at each other and nodding more and smiling, because nobody wanted to miss story time, not even Tina Poleetie, who usually slept through it.

And after a couple of minutes of that, people started looking at Ms. W., nodding their heads real hard, sticking out their chests, and saying out loud, "I think that's a great idea" and "Yes, let's have a guest reader today," because they were realizing that maybe they could be the Guest Reader and Star Student of the Afternoon. They wanted to remind Ms. Washington that not only were they **superb** readers, but wonderful human beings, too.

Especially Calvin "Big-Headed" Faribault, who actually raised his hand, and I just knew it was to volunteer out of the kindness of his big, fat, big-headed heart.

But Ms. W. didn't even look in Calvin's direction. "Ida, since I know you've read the book," she said to me weakly, like it was her last request, "could you please read the first chapter today?"

Well, I was so shocked and embarrassed, sitting there with my mouth wide open, that I almost couldn't tell that all the other kids were staring at me with their mouths wide open, too. Making words into story music like Ms. W. did was the one thing I wanted to do more than just about anything in the world. But telling a story out loud in front of my class at Ernest B. Lawson Elementary School was nearly the last thing I'd want to do in my entire life. I was so confused about whether I should be happy or scared, I just sat there.

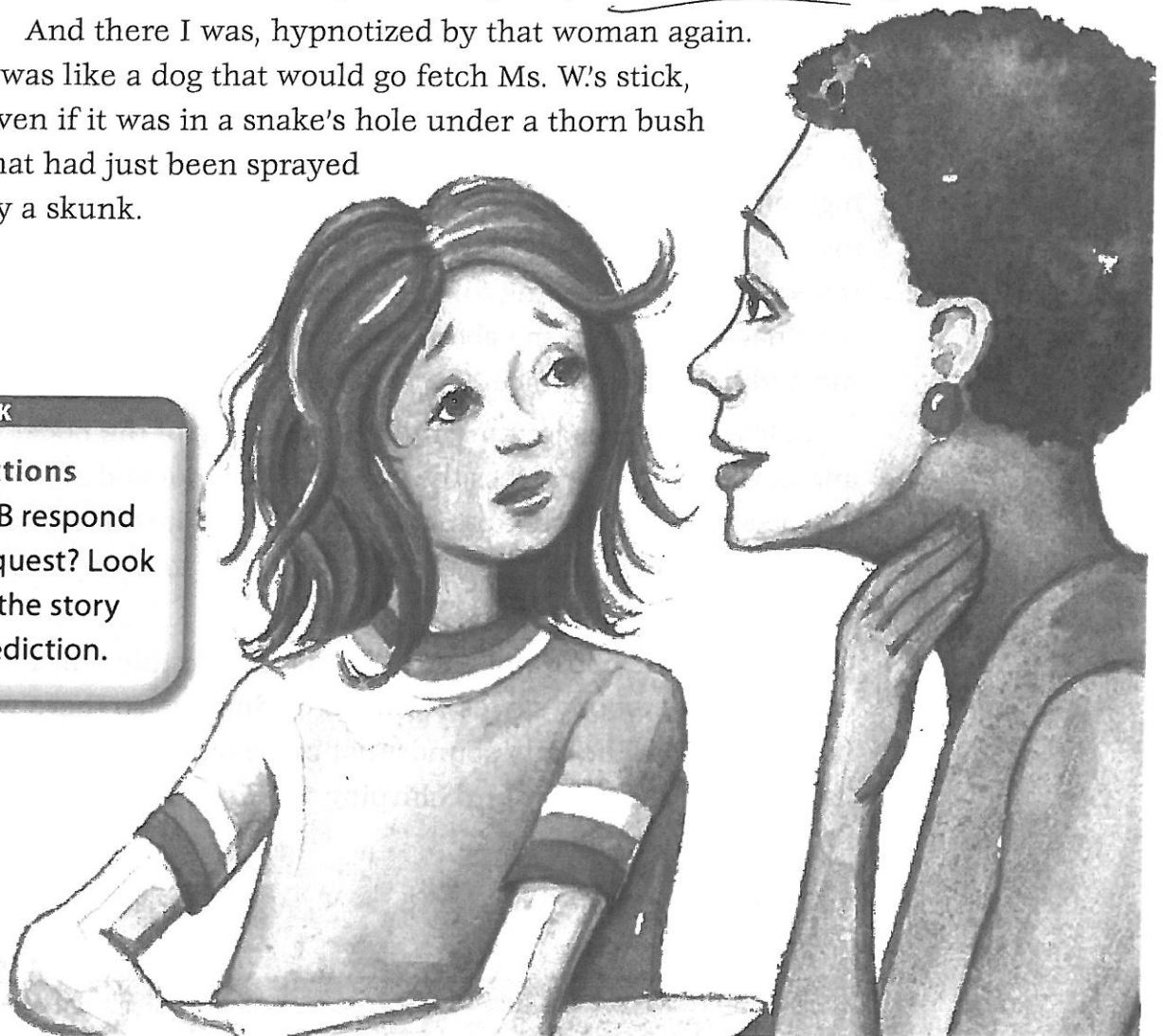
Ms. W. got up, walked over to me, put her face next to my **stunned** and frozen one, and whispered, "Ida, I need your help."

And there I was, hypnotized by that woman again. I was like a dog that would go fetch Ms. W.'s stick, even if it was in a snake's hole under a thorn bush that had just been sprayed by a skunk.

#### STOP AND CHECK

##### Make Predictions

How will Ida B respond to Ms. W.'s request? Look for details in the story to Make a Prediction.



I looked at Ms. W., just scared now, because I knew I was going to do it but I didn't know how.

"I know you'll be great," she croaked.

And in my head I was already trotting off, looking for that stick, even though I could smell the stink and the thorns were pricking me.

"Do you want to sit there, or in my chair?" Ms. W. asked.

"I'll sit here," I mumbled.

She set the book down on my desk, brought her chair over, sat down next to me, put her head back, and closed her eyes.

"Whenever you're ready, Ida," she rasped.

Ms. W. had given me quite a few books to read already because it only took me one or two days at the most to read them, unless I was working on my Terrify the People Who Bought Our Land Project. *Alexandra Potemkin and the Space Shuttle to Planet Z* was my favorite so far. It was Rufus's favorite, too.

I got tingly in my fingers thinking about opening up the book and reading those words out loud, making my voice go high and low, rough and smooth, like I did in my room. But my legs were shivering like they were out in a blizzard, and my stomach was flipping forward, then backward, forward, then backward, thinking about all of those people looking at me and hearing my voice.

I closed my eyes, put my right hand on top of the book, and passed it lightly across the cover. It was cool and smooth like a stone from the bottom of the brook, and it stilled me. A whole other world is inside there, I thought to myself, and that's where I want to be.

I opened the book and got ready to read the title, but I could feel everybody's eyes on me, crowding me so there was hardly any air. The only sounds that came out of me were little peeps, like a baby bird chirping "*Alexandra Potemkin and the Space Shuttle to Planet Z.*"



Ms. Washington, with her eyes still closed, leaned over and whispered, "You'll have to read louder, honey, so everyone can hear."

"Yes, ma'am," I whispered back. I took a deep breath, filled my stomach up with air, and then made my muscles squeeze it out, so it pushed a big gust of wind over my voice box and out my mouth.

"Chapter One," I bellowed. My voice was so loud it surprised me, and I jumped back a little in my chair.

But nobody laughed. They were listening.

The book is about Alexandra, and her parents think she is quite difficult, but actually she is a **genius** who is assisting the also-genius scientist Professor Zelinski in her quest to explore the lost planet Z. Alexandra gets into some trouble, but really she is just a very **focused** person.

At first, I was worrying about all of those people watching and listening. But after a few minutes, I left that classroom and went into the story. I was in Alexandra's laboratory instead of at school, and I was just saying out loud everything I saw her do or felt her feel. I let my voice tell the way she did it and saw it and felt it.



And I was so looking forward to seeing what happened next, I forgot that I was reading. All of a sudden it was the end of the chapter and it was like I was snatched out of a dream and couldn't quite recall where I was. I looked around and saw I was sitting at a desk, there was a book in front of me, kids were staring at me, and slowly I remembered.

I glanced over at Ms. W., and she smiled and whispered, "Thank you very much, Ida. That was lovely."

I handed Ms. W. the book, and we got back to work and everything was just like always, except that Ms. W. had to write all the instructions on the board instead of talking them.

At study time when I went to Ronnie's desk, he looked right in my eyes and said, "You read real good, Ida." And this time it was me staring down at my shoes like they might disappear if I didn't keep watching them.

My throat got stopped up so I could hardly say, "Thank you."

Nothing was different except the warm glow that was in my belly and my arms and my legs and my head and wouldn't go away. Even on the long, cruddy bus ride home.

#### STOP AND CHECK

**Confirm or Revise Predictions** How does Ida B respond to the challenge of reading in front of the class? What does this tell about her? Use the strategy Confirm or Revise Predictions.



"How was school today, Ida B?" Mama and Daddy would ask me every day after I first went back to Ernest B. Lawson Elementary School.

And every day I'd say, "It was O.K.," which now also stood for Overwhelming Kalamity.

"Well, what did you do?"

And I would just tell them the facts, hard and cold like my heart. "We had English, then we had science, then we went to the gym..." with no ups or downs or any part of the real me in there.

It was the same thing every day, and it was so boring and old and dry like stale bread I couldn't believe they kept trying for as long as they did.

After a while, though, they gave up. They'd just say, "How are you doing, Ida B?"

"O.K.," I'd mumble.

And that would be it. I didn't think they needed any more words than that to let them know that there was nothing close to joy floating around inside me.

But this day was different. The good feeling I had from reading that story out loud had been growing bit by bit all afternoon, till it ended up being a full-blown happiness by the time I got home. I'd keep thinking about what I did, and how it felt, and the warm brightness in me would get bigger and stronger and shinier every time.



My legs wanted to skip down the drive instead of walk. My mouth wanted to smile instead of scowl. My arms wanted to hug somebody instead of holding my backpack to my chest like a shield. My heart was horrified.

That happiness would not be satisfied staying inside me, either. It wanted to be shared. And it didn't mind who it shared itself with, including Mama and Daddy.

I could just imagine having dinner with the two of them and all kinds of good feelings spilling out of me. There I'd be, grinning and gabbing, and the next thing you'd know Mama and Daddy would be thinking that I had transformed into my old perky self, that school was the best thing that ever happened to me, and maybe everything had worked out just fine after all.

And that would not be acceptable.

I was not going to let that happiness compromise my stand that, even though good things might happen in the world from time to time, nothing was right in my family or in my valley.

So I tried to get rid of some of it before dinnertime by telling Rufus and Lulu about my Out Loud Reading Adventure. I sat them both on my bed, and while Lulu glared at Rufus with the deadliest **disdain**, I told them my story. Two thumps of Rufus's tail and a bored yawn from Lulu, though, didn't quiet that feeling down at all.



By the time I sat down to dinner, that happiness was doing somersaults of excitement in my stomach. It was jiggling with delight at the **prospect** of telling Mama and Daddy about my day. It was itching to talk about how pleased I was with Ms. W. and the stories she gave me, and reading *Alexandra Potemkin and the Space Shuttle to Planet Z* most of all. It even wanted to start chatting about Ronnie.

I tried to get away before any of the pleasure leaked out of me.

"I'm not hungry. Can I be excused?" I asked.

Daddy, however, was prepared to spoil my plan. "You need to eat your dinner, Ida B," he said.

"Eat a little bit, honey," Mama added.

Well, by that point my heart was beating extra hard trying to keep that happiness down and quiet, and it was losing ground fast. I realized I'd have to let some of it out so I could rein the rest of it in and get control of my insides again.

I focused on my carrots, lining them up with my fork vertically, then horizontally, then zigzag. And I released one tiny tidbit of cheer.

"I read a book out loud to my class today," I said, struggling to keep my voice low and even.

Daddy looked up and stared, like he didn't quite know what to do with a bit of conversation from me.

"Oh, Ida B, did you like it?" Mama asked, smiling at me.

I just nodded my head.

"What did you read?" Mama kept on.

"Just a book about a girl," I told those carrots.

"Did you know the book, or was that the first time you read it?"

"I read it before."

"Were you scared reading in front of all of those people, Ida B?"

I shrugged, like it was such a not-big-deal I could hardly recall. "Not really."



"Was it wonderful, baby?" Mama asked.

And as soon as Mama said it, I felt every drop of the goodness from reading that story. It flooded my insides, and I couldn't stop the happiness from pouring out of me.

✓ "Yes," I said.

Then I looked right at Mama, for the first time in what seemed like forever, and she wasn't looking at me, but into me. She was pulling me to her with her eyes, like she used to do. All of a sudden I could see the light that was Mama's shining out of her eyes. I couldn't help smiling at it.

"Be careful," my heart warned me.

But I was having a hard time remembering that there was anything to be careful about. Because if I just looked at Mama's eyes, and not her bald head or her pale skin, I could tell that the part of her I thought had gone away forever was still there and glowing, only from deep down inside her.

**STOP AND CHECK**

**Visualize** How does Ida B's behavior toward her parents change? Visualizing her actions may help you.